

9 REDUCING BARRIERS FOR NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

Overview

Washington's higher education system works well for traditional students – the recent high school graduates who go from high school to college and continuously enroll until they receive their degrees. It works less well for “non-traditional” students, although the community and technical colleges in particular have made significant advancements in programs and services during the past decade. “Non-traditional” students include, but are not limited to, unemployed adults, students whose first language is not English, and those who need to balance college, work, and family obligations.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board believes that it is imperative that the higher education system recognize and respond to the educational and training needs of non-traditional students. By increasing the skills and knowledge of these students through education and training, we will be increasing their opportunities to better serve themselves and the state's economic needs and development.

Analysis

The state needs to more closely target its educational initiatives to the needs of non-traditional students and to make better connections between educational and career opportunities.

One critical element in linking educational and career opportunities is to make better use of economic data, particularly in the area of demographic and job development projections linked to the levels of educational attainment. Existing information sources are inconsistent and subject to varying, and sometimes conflicting, interpretation. Therefore, it is essential for the board to join the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, and the state Department of Employment Security in identifying the best sources of data to inform the development and evolution of new or continuing educational services.¹

A related important element is a comprehensive needs assessment that examines demand for adult basic education services, job training and retraining, English language instruction, and other programs that primarily serve the growing population of non-traditional students. For example, in its report “Opportunity, Education and Washington's Economic Future,”² the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC) indicates that:

¹ This element is addressed in the “Meeting Regional Higher Education Needs” proposal.

² SBCTC, Opportunity, Education and Washington's Economic Future, May 2004, p. 14.

- “There are 485,000 adults in Washington who lack high school diplomas...”
The SBCTC correctly points out that increasing workplace literacy requirements will lead to increasing “demand for basic reading, writing, math and computer courses.”
- “More than 255,000 Washington adults speak limited English and could benefit from English as a Second Language instruction.”
- The Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (WTECB) explains in its report, “High Skills, High Wages: Our Agenda for Action,” that “in today’s economic context, there is an increasing need to train and retrain incumbent workers to keep pace with technological advances and to take advantage of high performance practices.”³

Finally, it is important for the board, in collaboration with the SBCTC, WTECB, and colleges and universities to coordinate current and future programs and efforts to reduce barriers to participation for non-traditional students.

Implementation Plan

1. Assess and address the need for educational and training programs for targeted non-traditional students.

By fall 2005, the HECB and its partners will identify targeted groups of non-traditional students and assess their education and training needs. The HECB and its partners then will use this information to advocate for new or expanded programs to serve the targeted groups of non-traditional students. HECB partners include public and private colleges, universities and career schools, and state K-12, workforce training and higher education agencies.

Performance measures

- Identification of targeted groups and completion of a needs assessment.
- Number of new or expanded programs for targeted groups of non-traditional students and number of targeted non-traditional students served by such programs.
- Participation rates and outcomes for targeted non-traditional students.

Estimated costs

No new administrative costs are expected for the assessment. However, new or expanded programs may result in additional costs to the colleges and universities.

3 WTECB, High Skills, High Wages: Our Agenda for Action, Draft July 2004, p. 6.

Examples of ongoing related work

- The SBCTC and the WTECB have conducted assessments of the educational needs of non-traditional students. These assessments will be resources in implementing this strategy.
- The HECB has begun developing the statewide needs assessment directed by House Bill 3103, which will include consideration of the needs of non-traditional students.
- Central Washington University's development of Bachelor of Applied Science degrees in safety and health management and industrial technology is an example of new programs targeted to non-traditional students. The HECB is reviewing these proposals for approval and CWU plans to submit other similar degree proposals in the future.
- The state's community and technical colleges are expanding and developing new programs that combine English as a Second Language instruction with vocational training to accelerate student progress and prepare these students for the Washington job market.⁴

2. Publicize best practices to meet the education and training needs of non-traditional students.

By February 2006, the HECB and its partners will complete a review of best practices in serving targeted non-traditional students and begin distributing this information statewide.

Performance measures

- Extent of statewide communication of best practices.

Estimated costs

No new administrative costs are expected.

Examples of ongoing related work

- The SBCTC and the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board have conducted studies of best practices in serving non-traditional students. These studies will be resources in the identification of best practices.
- Heritage University has held national conferences on effective ways to break down barriers to participation for non-traditional students.

⁴ SBCTC, Opportunity, Education and Washington's Economic Future, May 2004, p. 15.

3. Strengthen the coordination of current efforts to provide education and training programs for non-traditional students.

On an ongoing basis, the HECB will work with its partners to coordinate efforts to address the needs of non-traditional students, through the approval of new degree programs at the public four-year colleges and universities, development of a statewide higher education needs assessment, and authorization of out-of-state colleges and universities to offer instruction and degree programs in Washington.

Performance measures

- The number of approved new or enhanced programs that focus on non-traditional students and the number of non-traditional students served by such programs.

Estimated costs

No additional costs are required for coordination, although new or expanded programs generally result in additional costs to the colleges and universities.

Examples of ongoing related work

- The HECB authorizes out-of-state and some in-state colleges and universities to offer bachelor's and advanced degree programs. Many of these programs address the needs of non-traditional students.
- The HECB also approves new programs at public four-year colleges and universities. New programs, especially those at the research universities' campuses and the comprehensive universities' off-campus learning centers, frequently are designed to meet the needs of non-traditional students.
- Community and technical colleges focus on non-traditional students. New programs in the two-year college system are subject to approval by the SBCTC.
- Private colleges and universities have developed a variety of programs focusing on non-traditional students. For example, Gonzaga University has an extensive distance education program, Seattle Pacific University and Whitworth College offer "upside down" degrees, and Saint Martin's College offers flexible scheduling and extensive internships. However, this information is not systematically reported to the HECB or other state agencies. Therefore, procedures to transmit such information will be essential to assure effective coordination of these programs.

4. Support and promote financial aid policies and programs targeted to non-traditional students.

The HECB is requesting \$2 million in the 2005-07 state operating budget for a pilot project to develop a financial aid program to assist adult students who work full-time while attending college part-time.⁵

During the 2004-05 academic year, the HECB will gather input from the financial aid community to determine whether non-traditional students should be specifically identified for priority assistance through the board's Future Teachers Conditional Scholarship and Loan Repayment program. Bilingual instruction is already identified as a priority in this program.

Performance measures

- The number of students served through the financial aid program for working adults (pending project approval and funding in the 2005-07 state operating budget).

Estimated costs

The HECB has requested \$2 million in 2005-07 for the pilot financial aid program.

Example of ongoing related work

The HECB developed rules for the modified Future Teachers Conditional Scholarship and Loan Repayment program, based on House Bill 2708.

5. Increase the number of current or new college instructors who are trained to teach adults, particularly those who require English language or bilingual instruction or are participating in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

By fall 2005, the HECB and its higher education partners will collaborate to identify and publicize grant programs to provide relevant instruction and training.

Performance measures

- The number of new or continuing grants to provide training in teaching adult learners and ESL and, consequently, the number of newly trained instructors.

⁵ This strategy is addressed in the board's financial aid policy proposal.

Estimated costs

Administrative work on this initiative would be absorbed within existing budgets. The state would incur no additional costs if this initiative took advantage of existing grant funds, such as high-demand enrollment funding for teacher training or certification.

Examples of ongoing related work

- The HECB has awarded several high-demand enrollment grants to universities for programs to serve non-traditional students over the past two years. Examples include the CWU “career switcher” program to retrain laid-off aerospace workers as math teachers and programs at CWU and WSU to increase the number of teachers trained to provide ESL instruction.
- The HECB also has awarded federal Title IIA teacher training grants to help colleges of education to better train ESL and bilingual teachers. For example, Heritage University is using a grant to prepare experienced teachers’ aides to become fully certified ESL and bilingual teachers.